

Building by the Book, Part 5: "One Epic Story"

John 5:39 ESV You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, **40** yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.

- I. Setting the scene for the text we just read, John chapter 5 begins with Jesus speaking to a man at the pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem. The man had been lame and unable to walk for a full 38 years. Jesus, as he so often was, is moved with compassion, and heals the man, simply telling him to take up his mat, and walk.
 - A. Instantly healed, the man joyfully begins to make his way through the crowded square, carrying his mat, when he is spotted by the Jewish leaders.
 1. They are not so joyful, rather they are in a tizzy because this man is carrying his mat on the Sabbath day, the day of rest (Scandal of scandals!)
 2. To them, this was a "day of rest" that was to be **enforced** by professional legalists like themselves. The idea was "rest, **or else!**"
 - B. When they find out that Jesus is behind all this healing that leads to a violation of the Sabbath, they are livid. When they confronted Jesus about his "unlawful" working on the Sabbath day, he simply says to them **John 5:17b ESV** "My Father is working until now, and I am working." They can continue their religious pretense, but he has a mission to accomplish.
 - C. Well that was too much! Not only is he violating the Sabbath, but also had the audacity to call God his own **father**, making himself equal with God. But Jesus, unaffected by their indignation, begins to proclaim his authority, explaining how everything he does flows from his connection to the Father.
 - D. After about 18 verses of this, Jesus does the unthinkable. He tells these so-called religious experts that they have completely misunderstood (worse; they have actually **refused to understand** the scriptures) the Word of God, and furthermore have missed the entire point of it!
 1. **John 5:39 ESV** You **search the Scriptures** because **you think that in them you have eternal life**; and it is they that **bear witness about me**.
 2. I have discovered that few people are happy to hear someone tell them that their interpretation of scripture is wrong! Even if that person is the author of the scriptures!
- II. This morning, I would like to talk about the point of scripture. This is something we talk about a lot around here, because I sincerely believe that there is no more pressing issue facing the church today.
 - A. You may be aghast at that statement, thinking that there are far more pressing issues confronting us!
 1. "What about the millions who are starving? What about sleazy politicians and anti-God policies? Abortion on demand? Rampant immorality? Global persecution of believers? Etc.?"
 2. My question to you this morning is this: how will we know God's answer to any of those things if we don't know what he has said? What if we don't understand what who he is, or what he thinks about us because we have

- gone to the scripture looking for answers only to minor on the majors, and major on the minors, entirely missing, like those Pharisees, the “big picture”?
- B. The Bible is a big book made up of 66 smaller books, and if you just jump into it without the help of Holy Spirit, and the wisdom of those who have gone before who have explored its depths, you will invariably come to multiple wrong conclusions. (i.e. the Bible is an instruction manual for marriage or finances, or a rule book for morality; or that it a science book that explains the ancient world; or that it is some book that reveals mysteries of the future.)
 - C. On some secondary, subordinate level, the Bible is all of those things, but what the Bible primarily is, simply, is a story. It is a narrative. It is an account of facts.
 - 1. It is a true story, having been tested time after time theologically, archaeologically, anthropologically, etc., always eventually coming out on top.
 - 2. It is a long story (spanning approximately 4,000 - 6,000 years) written by approximately 40 authors over the course of approximately 1500 years.
 - 3. Yet in spite of all of this, it is a single, epic story. One that is consistent and miraculous. One that could be described as both a love story and an adventure tale.
 - D. And so today, what I want to do is tell you the **entire** story of the Bible. Genesis to Revelation. Now, I can almost hear you saying, “Fasten your seatbelt, Mabel! We’re going to be here for awhile!” But don’t worry! I am going to attempt to do this in the time that we normally allot to preaching. Are you ready? Here we go...
- III. In the beginning, God created the cosmos. He created it perfect and beautiful, mysterious and wonderful. He filled this earth with ferns and daisies, ladybugs and giraffes, humpback whales and hummingbirds. Creation was **vast** and **diverse**.
- A. The crowning achievement of creation was reserved for the last day...a man and a woman. They were different than any other creation because of four things:
 - 1. Whereas everything else was spoken into existence, the man and the woman were handmade by God.
 - 2. Secondly they were given something that nothing else had: a thinking, feeling, choosing soul. They were spiritual beings in an earthly realm, while the plants and animals would live by design and instinct.
 - 3. Third, they were made in the image of the creator, God himself.
 - 4. And lastly, the man and his wife were blessed and commissioned by God to be his partners in this grand enterprise. Nothing else could boast of that role.
 - B. They loved God and God loved them. He gave them everything on earth for their discovery, development and pleasure, except for one fruit tree in the whole of creation, telling them if they ate it, they would die.
 - C. But then, one day, something terrible happened. A deceiving serpent slithered into their home and convinced the man and the woman that God was holding out on them by not letting them eat from the one tree.
 - 1. His deception worked, they ate of the tree, and all of the sudden they knew that they were naked and greatly insufficient in themselves. They sensed that now they were disconnected from the life that had flowed so freely from God.
 - 2. Because of their rebellion, they came under a curse. God told them that the ground would produce thorns when they wanted fruit, and that the woman’s joyful childbearing would be overshadowed by pain.

3. Eventually God evicted them from their home, but as he did he did two very interesting things: he killed an innocent animal, shedding it's blood in order to cover their nakedness with it's skin; and he promised that a day was coming when one known as the "seed of the woman" would crush the head of the serpent, who was responsible for their being deceived.
- IV. So life goes on and the sin that they thought was just a momentary lapse of judgement proves to be an always-fatal epidemic of the soul that infects 100% of the human race. Even their own son murders his brother as humanity continues to go from bad to worse in a sinful decline.
- A. After several generations we read **Genesis 6:5 ESV** The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that **every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. 6** And the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart.
 - B. So God decided to take drastic action. He would flood the entire earth with water as an act of judgment against the unrestrained wickedness of the human race.
 1. But before he does, we are told **Genesis 6:8 ESV** But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord.
 2. Yet are never told **why** Noah found favor, we just see that God was willing, because he is good, to extend grace to one man and his family.
 3. So God tells Noah to build a giant boat to preserve his family and mating pairs of the diverse animal life on the earth. After the flood, when the water recedes and they leave the boat, God gives them a promise, with the sign of the rainbow, stating that he will never wipe out the earth by a flood again.
 - C. But as more time passes, the generations that descend from Noah's line are no better! Even a worldwide flood can't cleanse the world of wickedness! In their persistent rebellion against him, the post-flood humans even build a tower to try and reach heaven to prove their worth without God, but the Lord comes down and puts a stop to their proud plans.
 - D. After the passage of some more time, the Bible's narrative centers on one elderly shepherd in the plains of Iraq named Abram. With no warning or explanation as to why, God speaks to him.
 1. **Genesis 12:1 ESV** Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. **2** And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. **3** I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."
 2. However, one problem quickly arises in Abram's mind: he has no heir! Even if God gives him blessings, how will he ever become a nation?
 - a) But God knew what he was doing! He promises Abram and his wife Sarai that they will one day have a natural born son of their own, even though they are 65 and 75 respectively at the time of the promise!
 - b) Needless to say they struggled to believe since that "factory" had been "shuttered" for quite some time!
 - E. But time marches on. God changes their names from Abram and Sarai to Abraham and Sarah as a sign of his promise. He also gives Abraham the

covenantal sign of circumcision, expecting to every male in his household to keep that sign for all generations, to show their connection to the one true God.

1. Eventually, after the passage of 25 years, when Sarah is 90, the day arrives when their tents are filled with the laughter of her own, natural-born child. In fact they named the child "Isaac" which means "laughter".
 2. And this was just the beginning of a growing family. Isaac grew up and had twin boys named Jacob and Esau. Jacob becomes known as Israel, eventually fathering 12 sons.
- F. Then, through a bizarre and scandalous series of events (which you can read about in Genesis 37-50), Jacob's favorite son named Joseph became the second most powerful man in the most powerful kingdom of his day, Egypt.
1. While there, a worldwide famine occurs and everyone streams to Egypt where there is food available. Even Joseph's father and brothers wind up there in order to feed their families.
 2. But instead of going back home, they stay there for 400 years, where eventually the King of Egypt subjugated all of the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and made them forced laborers in his vast kingdom.
- G. **Exodus 2:23 ESV** During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. **24** And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. **25** *God saw the people of Israel—and God knew.*
- V. It was at this point that God raised up a man named Moses who was born a Jew, but through adoption had been raised in Pharaoh's household. Through a rash decision, Moses had fallen from the King's favor, and was living as a fugitive in the desert. God appears to him in a burning bush and tells him to confront Pharaoh, ordering him to let God's people go to a promised land that he has given to them forever.
- A. Moses eventually complies with God's commissioning, yet Pharaoh staunchly refuses to let the people go.
1. Even though God rains down 9 miraculous and horrible plagues on the Egyptians, he won't budge!
 - a) So God sends a 10th and final plague, sending his angel to go through all of Egypt, killing the firstborn son of every household. But the Israelites are divinely protected by obediently placing the blood of a sacrificed lamb on their doorposts.
 - b) Finally, as every household in Egypt wails in the night, Pharaoh releases his slaves.
 2. His relenting is short lived, however, as with a changed heart and mind he pursues them to the edge of the Red Sea to bring them back.
 - a) The Hebrews find themselves cornered with the sea before them and Pharaoh's army behind them.
 - b) But miraculously, God splits the sea open and they cross through unscathed and on dry land! But when Pharaoh's army pursues them into the sea it crashes down on them, drowning the whole lot!
- B. You would think that seeing such a rescue would make their faith soar and cause them to trust God and put away their sin, but very soon after this event they

Israelites begin complaining about everything! “What are we supposed to eat and drink!”, they cry. When God makes food literally rain from the sky, they say, “Is this what we’re supposed to eat? We were better off in Egypt!”

- C. God eventually leads them to a mountain in Saudi Arabia named Sinai where he will give them his Law (including the 10 commandments) and a sacrificial system in order that they might approach him in his holiness.
 - 1. At the foot of the mountain the people promised to do everything that God instructed them to do, but while Moses is up on the mountain receiving God’s holy law, the people make a golden calf and claim that it is now their god.
 - 2. Not even receiving God’s handwritten instructions is enough to free them from the curse of sin and rebellion, which they conclusively prove over and over during the 40 years that they will wander in the wilderness! They engage in grumbling, complaining, sexual immorality, and idolatry over and over even though they are walking in the very shadow of his manifested presence!
- D. **Hebrews 3:16 ESV** For who were those who heard and yet rebelled? Was it not all those who left Egypt led by Moses? **17** And with whom was he provoked for forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? **18** And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his rest, but to those who were disobedient?
 - 1. God let the entire generation that came out of Egypt, including Moses, perish in the wilderness because of their unbelief and disobedience. But he raised up a new generation, and new leader, Joshua, who brings them to their new home after 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. Once again they pledge absolute obedience to God as they stand on the border of the promised land.
 - 2. It seemed like things were finally different. At the first battle to conquer the inhabitants of the land at Jericho, God demonstrates his power as the fortified walls of the citadel come tumbling down at the blast of the Hebrew trumpets.
 - a) The people are instructed at this first city not to collect any spoils, as the entire city has been devoted to destruction as holy to the Lord.
 - b) But when Israel is routed by an inferior force during the second battle at Ai, it is discovered that a man named Achan has kept some silver and a shirt from the battle at Jericho. The people deal with him, and are able to continue their conquest, but we see that not even a new home will change their heart and cleanse the people of sin.
- E. Sadly, after they conquer most of the land, this cycle of sin is seen clearly the book of Judges. It went like this: Israel would fall into deep sin and idolatry in their new home and God would send an oppressor to judge them. The people would then realize their error and cry out for deliverance.
 - 1. God would raise up a “judge”, someone with a special anointing and the combat skills to defeat their enemies and give them relief. But unfortunately, as soon as they were delivered, the cycle would begin again.
 - 2. God’s repeated delivery through the judges had no effect on the continuing sin cycle of Israel. So after several generations of this, the people decide that instead of judges, they need a king like all the other nations! Before this only God had been their king.

- VI. But God allows them to have their king. He sends a prophet named Samuel to anoint a man named Saul to be the new Israelite king. Things start off ok, but God eventually rejects Saul as king of his people because of Saul's disobedient heart. He sends Samuel to anoint a 17-year-old shepherd boy named David to be the future king. After this, David wins a decisive military victory against Israel's enemies, the Philistines, and Saul becomes inflamed with jealousy, determined to kill David.
- A. After several years of Saul's reign, Israel is defeated by the Philistines, Saul is killed and the kingdom is divided. David takes his place as king and is able to unite the kingdom, ushering in a great period of success for the nation.
 - 1. God calls David a man after his own heart, and promises him that one of his descendant will always sit upon his throne. It looks like finally things will change for God's people.
 - 2. But as he ages, David falls into major sin, committing adultery with a married woman, even arranging for her husband to be murdered in order to cover up what he has done. Though he repents with bitter tears, his kingdom is never the same. His remaining years are filled with scandals and attempted coups.
 - B. After David dies, his son Solomon becomes king and builds on the wealth and glory of his father's kingdom, even building a glorious temple for God.
 - 1. But Solomon has his hang-ups as well, primarily sexual ones. He amasses a harem of 1,000 wives and concubines to satisfy his every lustful desire.
 - 2. These women, mostly from foreign lands, quickly draw him into the worship of their false gods, and Solomon's heart is seduced away from the Lord.
 - C. When Solomon dies, his foolish son Rehoboam ascends to the throne and under his reckless rule the kingdom is once again divided. There is a northern kingdom known as Israel, and a southern kingdom called Judah -where Jerusalem is.
 - 1. The kingdom of Israel never had a single righteous king after this point. It declined into worse and worse idolatry until it was finally conquered and dispersed forever by the Assyrian empire after about 200 years in 722 BC.
 - 2. Judah fared a little better, alternating between righteous and unrighteous kings, but it's people embraced all kinds of idol worship, rejecting the Lord God who loved them so. So in about 598 BC, God sent Babylon to overthrow the nation, destroy their temple, and to place them into captivity for 70 years.
- VII. So we find ourselves at the the end of the Old Testament and nothing has rescued the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve from the curse. A worldwide flood of wrath didn't. A dramatic rescue from Egyptian slavery didn't. The giving of God's handwritten law and sacrificial system didn't. A brand new homeland didn't. The rescue of judges didn't. Not even the rule of kings like David helped. Is there any hope for humanity?
- A. But if we look more closely we see a glimmer of light in all this darkness! All during the time of the kings and the captivity in Babylon, prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Daniel prophesied that God was not done with his people, and more then that! One day he would rescue the entire world (not just the Jews) from the curse.
 - B. And at the end of their prophecies, God goes silent. For 400 years no prophetic voice is heard. Time marches on slowly...

VIII. Then one night an angel shows up in the fields outside of King David's hometown of Bethlehem and says, to the shepherds in those fields, **Luke 2:10b ESV** "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. **11** For unto you is born **this day** in the city of David **a Savior**, who is Christ the Lord."

A. All the prophecies pointed to **this** moment. He had come. Not just a temporary fix like one of the judges of old, but THE Judge, and more, THE Savior!

1. He grew into a man, and John the Baptist looked at him one day while he was coming into Jordan river to be baptized, and said, **John 1:29b ESV** "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" Finally a sacrificial Lamb had been provided that could make a difference. Not just cover sin, but take it away!
2. As the final, perfect King of the Jews, Jesus would spend 3 years preaching about the kingdom he had come to establish, and demonstrating it's power, wealth and glory by healing the sick, evicting demons and raising the dead.
3. But behind all of his teaching and healing was his mission: to take away the sins of the world as the Lamb of God.
 - a) It would be unlike the time of Noah. No flood of wrath would fall on humankind. Now the wrath of God would all fall on the innocent Son.
 - b) It would be unlike the rescue from Egypt. The people would not be rescued only to remain under the power of their sins and idolatries, rather the power of sin would be broken forever, and the enemies of their souls swept away like the Egyptians in the Red Sea, never to be seen again.
 - c) He would even fulfill demands of God's Law, because he would live perfectly **for us**, while also taking the penalty for our failure to do so.
 - d) And when his work was finished, He would be the King that the prophet Isaiah spoke of, who would reign in righteousness forever and ever.
4. And will this would be accomplished, not by military might, or political wrangling, but by humbling submitting to an undeserved execution on a Roman cross. The righteous one would die that sinners might live.
 - a) But the the promise he gave three times to his followers was that death would not be able to hold him. He would rise after three days.
 - b) This was his greatest act as king. Not only did he do away with sin, but he freed us from the just wages of all of our sinning by defeating death for us as well.
5. Well, just as he promised, after three days, he did physically rise from the dead, sticking around for 40 days, showing himself to be alive to over 500 witnesses with what Luke calls, "many convincing proofs", before ascending to heaven, to take his place of authority at the right hand of his Father.

IX. But that was hardly the end of the story! The book of Acts tells of how his followers, empowered by the Holy Spirit, began to proclaim this story to the entire known world. And in just one single generation, this message that we call "the gospel" or "good news" reached all the way from tiny Judea, to the Emperor's palace in Rome, and has been spreading around the world ever since.

A. In the remainder of the New Testament, from Romans to Jude, Paul, James, Peter, John and Jude writes letters to explain the deep implications of the gospel message for our lives.

1. Almost all of their letters conclude by showing us the lives that we can now live in a world where the power of sin, the world, the flesh and the devil has been forever conquered. The gospel says that we who believe in Jesus are no longer slaves! We are free to live in a brand new way because of Christ!
 2. What angels, prophets and the people of Israel longed for generations to see has all come upon **us**! True freedom from sin, and liberty from the curse of death and hell to all who believe!
- B. But even that's not the end of the story! In a very real sense the story has no end! It is as boundless as the grace of God that made it possible! In the final book of the Bible, the Revelation of Jesus Christ, we see that Christ's work is continuing as he rules from his heavenly throne.
1. Though the nations rage, he reigns. Though they threaten, he triumphs. Though they oppress and persecute, he saves and redeems.
 2. And one day the all of his redeeming work will be revealed in a new heavens and a new earth. **Revelation 21:3 ESV** And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. **4** He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."
- X. God has done it. Jesus has crushed the head of the serpent just as he promised to way back in Genesis. He is the righteous King.
- A. What is stopping you from repenting of all you're trusting in (religion, morality, wealth, wisdom, strength, beauty, etc.), and trusting him alone as the answer to everything you've ever wanted, and everything you've ever needed.
 - B. There is, and never will be, any other answer!